BALLOT BOX TOOLKIT
An organizing kit for increasing voter turnout in your community
# BALLOT BOX TOOLKIT

**www.canadians.org/election**

#GoVote2015

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INTRODUCTION

Our democracy is in crisis. Free speech, the right to protest, the right to vote in free and fair elections, and the right to not be subjected to widespread, invasive, and unjustifiable state surveillance are all being threatened. The erosion of these democratic rights and more has brought us to a tipping point in the relationship between the people and our government.

The Harper government won its majority in the last election with just 6,201 votes across 14 ridings. Meanwhile, more than 9 million eligible voters didn’t cast a ballot. Increasing voter turnout can change the math in the next election.

Through our “Go vote!” campaign, the Council of Canadians is reaching out to people across the country, informing them about election issues, giving them useful tools and resources, and most importantly, encouraging everyone to vote in the upcoming federal election. Reaching out to youth is also one of our main focuses. Close to two out of every three young people didn’t vote in the last election. Through our “Game Changers” campaign we’re empowering youth to get involved and cast their ballot.

It’s time for change. By building a movement of committed voters we can create a path to a different future. If we want genuine change this federal election, thousands of us from coast to coast to coast need to speak up, stand up, and show up. The Ballot Box Toolkit will give you ideas of things you can do to bring about change in your community this election.
GETTING OUT THE VOTE

ORGANIZING VOTER OUTREACH AND CANVASSING

The most time-tested way of increasing voter turnout is direct face-to-face engagement with potential voters.

Tips for building your local canvassing team and campaign

- Develop a local canvassing calendar.
- Canvassing should be done in three-hour shifts and in pairs, during evenings between 5 and 8 p.m. or on weekends after 10 a.m. and before 8 p.m.
- The best option for door canvassing is in high density urban or suburban residential neighbourhoods, since the objective is to talk to as many people as you can.
- In addition to door-to-door canvassing and voter outreach at pedestrian hubs (main intersections, malls, farmers markets, etc.) try to get to local festivals and concerts with your canvassing team.
- Make recruiting and cultivating local anchors (neighbourhood captains and street captains) through in-person training an ongoing part of your local organizing.
- Build in fun with music and a festive atmosphere.
- Encourage people to organize kitchen parties, BBQs, neighbourhood block parties and gatherings, frontyard outreach, etc.
- Encourage members of your team to each call 10-20 people they know and invite them to take the Voter Pledge and to volunteer on the campaign.

ORGANIZING A YOUTH VOTE CANVASS

You can organize a youth canvass in five simple steps!

1. Hold a meeting with people interested in organizing the event.
2. Together, confirm a date and location. When determining your location find a strategic place that is easy to get to, accessible, and will hold a crowd. Popular locations could include universities, colleges and shopping malls.
3. Get the word out! Create a poster, Facebook event and talk to people you know. You will need at least 5-10 people to attend the canvass.

SIGN THE VOTER PLEDGE

The Council of Canadians’ Voter Pledge allows you to pledge your commitment to vote in the federal election. You can also use it as conversation starting point with your friends, family and neighbours – get them to sign the pledge too! If you haven’t already done so, sign the Voter Pledge online at www.canadians.org/voterpledge or text “VOTE” TO 123411.
4. Get the materials you need.

» Email Philippe Charbonneau at pcharbonneau@canadians.org to request canvassing materials.

» Purchase clipboards for each person canvassing. Print a sample script. (See below.)

» Print a sample agenda for a brief canvassing training before you go out and canvass. (See below.)

5. Host your canvass!

» Follow the sample agenda.

» Set goals for your team canvass. How many Voter Pledges do you want your team to collect during the canvass? Can you get out more than once? Set realistic goals. It’s often possible for just six people to collect 100 Voter Pledges in one hour of canvassing. Setting realistic goals and achieving them can give people a sense of purpose and motivation. Be sure to ask people for their postal code and riding. If they do not know, have a map available so that people can find the information. Collecting sound data will help us target our organizing.

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**Sample canvassing script**

Hi!

My name is __________________________ and I am a volunteer with the Council of Canadians’ Democracy campaign.

We are concerned that the current federal government is headed in the wrong direction and we want to see a change in government to one that actually reflects our values. Is this something that you want as well?

That’s great! Did you know that in the 2011 election, just a handful of voters (6,201 to be precise) made the difference in electing a majority government for the Harper Conservatives? More than 9.4 million Canadians did not vote. Even more worrisome, the age group with the lowest percentage of voter turnout was youth ages 18-24.

This time around there’s a real chance that voter turnout could be much higher and you can be a part of making sure that happens. You have the power to make a difference in the upcoming federal election with the vote you cast at the ballot box.

Will you commit to being a voter in the next election by signing this pledge? Would you be willing to encourage at least two friends or family members to take the Voter Pledge too? **Will you be a first-time voter?**

What’s your plan for getting to the polling station on Election Day? Will you need help getting there? We may follow-up after the election to discuss your voting experience.

Thanks so much!

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**FAQ**

Q. Why do you need my email?

A. To follow up with information about voting and to share Council of Canadians campaign updates.

Q. Who should I vote for?

A. The Council of Canadians is a non-partisan organization. We do not endorse any party or candidate, but you can read our Voter’s Guides to see where the parties stand on key issues.
CONVINCING PEOPLE WHY IT’S IMPORTANT TO VOTE

“Studies presented at Stanford on March 30 showed that more voters are motivated to go to the booths when they are told turnout will be high and when they are provoked to discuss plans for getting there. Moreover, they also are more likely to vote when they are threatened with personal accountability and when they are encouraged to see voting as an intrinsic part of their identity, rather than just ‘something they do.’”

“Two get-out-the-vote field experiments found that messages emphasizing low expected turnout were less effective at motivating voters than those emphasizing high expected turnout. But the effect was found only among citizens who voted infrequently or occasionally... the results suggest voter mobilization efforts should emphasize high turnout, especially when targeting occasional and low-participation voters.”

“In another study, researchers showed that people are more likely to head for the ballots when they are encouraged to see voting as a noble aspect of their character. One way to do this is to use nouns rather than verbs. One version of a survey conducted online used a self-relevant noun. (‘How important is it to you to be a voter in the upcoming election?’) Another referred to voting using a verb (How important is it to you to vote in the upcoming election?)”

– *The Psychology Around Voter Turnout*, Stanford University, 2012

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR CANVASSING TRAINING

Here is an agenda for a canvassing training that you can use or adapt. The times on the agenda are based on a weekday evening. Ideal times to canvass are between 6 and 9 p.m. on weekday evenings or between 12 and 4 p.m. on weekends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6:00-6:40 p.m. – Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00-6:10 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People arrive, Indigenous territory acknowledgement, introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Welcome people and provide an Indigenous territory acknowledgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Do introductions and pass around a sign-in sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How many people have done canvassing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Canvassing – is this the best use of our time? What if I only collect 2-3 pledges? Yes! The margin of victory in some ridings in 2011 was less than 20 votes – every vote can make a difference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6:10-6:15 p.m.
Overview of current moment

- **Challenge:** Why should we care: The Conservatives got a majority with only 6,201 votes in the last federal election.

- **Opportunity:** 9 million people did not vote in the last election, including two out of every three youth. If more of us vote, we can make a difference.

- **Overview of riding:**
  - Goal for tonight: collect three pledges each. If there are 20 people, aim for 60 pledges in an hour of canvassing.
  - Margin of victory in this riding from last election: __________
  - We’re aiming for thousands of voter pledges signed across the country between now and election day.

6:15-6:25 p.m.
Tips for canvassing

Three tips for good canvassing:

1. **Connect with people.** Be yourself, smile and be genuine.

2. **Get good information.** Make sure people print their name and contact information clearly. Ask for their riding and how they intend to vote as well.

3. **Watch the time.** Don’t spend half an hour with one person, aim for a few minutes so you can see more people.

6:25-6:30 p.m.
Materials, role play and photo

- **Sample script:**
  
  Hi, my name is _________ and I am with the Council of Canadians. We are encouraging people to “Go Vote!” in the federal election on October 19. It’s time for a change and we can get that change if more people vote. We want a government that will support good jobs, the environment, etc. Will you pledge to vote in the election?

Role play with three types of people you may encounter while canvassing

1. Positive: agrees to pledge to vote.

2. Negative: leaning towards voting Conservative or not at all.

3. On the fence: tell them that every vote matters!

Quick review of materials: maps, canvassing sheet, etc.

Don’t forget to take a group photo and send it to webmaster@canadians.org so we can post it on our website and social media and inspire others.

6:30-7:30 p.m. – Head out in the community for voter outreach and canvassing!

7:30-8:00 p.m. – Return, debrief and wrap up
What is the long-term plan?

» Canvassing can get monotonous, so prioritize having games, appreciation for the volunteers and keeping morale up.

» You can attend things like festivals, BBQs and farmers’ markets.

» Set a weekly goal for how many pledges you would like to collect in the riding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 31 - September 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 7 - 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14 - 20</td>
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<td>September 21 - 27</td>
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<td>September 28 - October 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 5 - 11</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 12 - 18</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials checklist

☐ Signs to direct people to the room where the training is taking place

☐ Clipboards

☐ Canvass sheets

☐ Scripts

☐ Buttons and voter pledge cards

☐ Sign-in sheet - Name, email, phone, how did you hear about the training?

☐ Pens

☐ Agenda

☐ Maps for where people should canvass: You can generate maps for printing at [www.maps.google.ca](http://www.maps.google.ca). Be sure to compare your selected canvassing areas to the riding maps at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca) (the link at the bottom left of the main page) to double-check the location of riding boundaries. Coordinate with local allied organizations where possible.
**Voter Pledge Collection Sheet**

**Province / Territory:** ___________________  **City/Town:** ___________________

**Riding:** ___________________  **Postal Code:** ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Number</th>
<th>Name / Email / Phone</th>
<th>Consent to Email?</th>
<th>Level of Interest</th>
<th>Follow-Up / Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes / No Initials:</td>
<td>☐ NH ☐ CB</td>
<td>2nd Language required?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes / No Initials:</td>
<td>☐ NH ☐ CB</td>
<td>2nd Language required?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interest:** 
1 = Pledged to vote + get at least two others to as well; 2 = Pledged to vote
3 = Won’t sign voter pledge right now, but can be approached again; 4 = No! (don’t bother / not voting);
NH = Not at home; CB = Come back later

**People can take the voter pledge online at:** www.canadians.org/voterpledge

**Please return completed canvass sheets by email to dpenner@canadians.org or by mail to 300-251 rue Bank St, Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3**

**Canvasser:** ___________________  **Contact Info:** ___________________  **Coordinator:** ___________________
HOW TO VOTE

The Council of Canadians has a factsheet aimed at youth that provides general information about how to register to vote, what identification you will need, and how to find your polling station. Read it at www.canadians.org/publications/have-your-say.

Elections Canada notes that there are four ways to vote:

1. Vote on election day: voters will need to be registered to vote and provide identification and proof of address.
2. Vote in an advance poll.
3. Vote at any Elections Canada office during the election.
4. Vote by special ballot.

For more information, visit www.elections.ca or call Elections Canada at 1-800-463-6868.

Taking Action for Fair Elections

The Council of Canadians, the Canadian Federation of Students, and three individual electors have filed more than 2,000 pages of powerful evidence for our charter challenge of the so-called “Fair” Elections Act. The applicants were seeking a court order quashing provisions of act, which will suppress the votes of tens of thousands of qualified electors.

While the Ontario Superior Court judge ruled there is risk that the new rules mean some people will not be able to vote in the federal election, he declined to issue an injunction preventing the changes. We appealed the ruling, but unfortunately the appeal was also denied. This makes increasing voter turnout even more important this election – it’s now also our last line of defence against voter suppression.

The expert evidence shows that tens of thousands of voters will be disenfranchised if the provisions remain in place during the next election. This could put the validity of the election results in question. For the latest updates on this ground-breaking legal challenge, visit: www.canadians.org/charter-challenge

CREATIVE VOTER OUTREACH IDEAS

There is no limit to the options for engaging people in creative ways to increase voter turnout in this election.

Community organizing for elections can include door-to-door canvassing, outreach at local festivals, organizing a table at local events or a busy street corner, reaching out to progressive musicians and asking them to promote the campaign from the stage at upcoming concerts, and taking voter selfies and sharing them on social media. Some of these ideas are expanded on below.

Consider these questions: Who are you working with? Who aren’t you working with? How can you reach out and expand your campaign to involve more people in your community?

ORGANIZE A BBQ OR BLOCK PARTY

Why?

Organizing locally is essential to building a truly grassroots movement for change. Block parties and neighbourhood BBQs are a great way of involving your neighbours in the campaign to get out the vote and having fun at the same time.

How?

1. Form an organizing committee.

2. Find out what your local bylaws are – if you plan on closing off a local street for the event, you’ll need a permit.

3. Pick activities, including music, games for kids.

4. Decide what food you’ll have and whether your committee is organizing it or if you’re doing a potluck.

5. Pick a location, time and date. Keeping it to a few hours on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon usually works well.

6. Provide a tent or some kind of shade. Tables and materials, including clipboards and “Go Vote” canvass sheets. Promote your event. Put up posters and put flyers in your neighbours’ mailboxes. Email your neighbours (ideally an initial email one month in advance and a reminder two weeks before the event). Set up a Facebook event. Tweet about it - #govote2015 BBQ.

For a more detailed guide on organizing a block party, see the City of Edmonton’s Neighbourhood Block Party Kit at www.edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/PDF/NeighbourhoodBlockPartyKit.pdf. The Edmonton kit is not specific to organizing an election-themed block party, but it contains a good overview of block party organizing in general.
ORGANIZE A PATIO CRAWL

A variation on door canvassing, a patio crawl is a great way to meet people where they are. It’s as simple as bringing your canvassing team to a main street with lots of patios on a nice day and talking to people there about why it’s important to vote in this election. You may be surprised just how receptive people are to talking about politics with you.

**Tips:**

- Pick a neighbourhood or street with enough patios for at least an hour of canvassing.
- Pick a spot for your canvassing team to meet and plan your voter outreach patio crawl.
- Be sure to bring your canvassing materials.

ORGANIZE A “SOULS TO THE POLLS” VOTING DRIVE

Are you part of a faith community? Here’s a great way to mobilize the vote in your local congregation! A few weeks before election day, organize buses and/or carpooling from your place of worship to the local voter registration / Elections Canada office. If it coincides with one of the advance polling dates, you can also bring people to the advance poll. Visit [www.canadians.org/vote](http://www.canadians.org/vote) for voting options in advance of election day.

Specific approaches may vary from faith to faith (for example, adherents of several Jewish denominations do not use vehicles during Shabat – most of Friday and Saturday). Consult with members of your faith community about what approach and timing will work best to coordinate people voting.

CHALK THE VOTE

A great family-friendly way to involve the whole community is to “Chalk the Vote.” The simple act of using sidewalk chalk to promote voting can be a fun way for kids to take part in the campaign. A great example of this is the creative work done in the most recent municipal election by the North York Community House. According to the Maytree Foundation:

> “On election day, children in the community drew chalk arrows, footsteps, and election symbols like checkmarks and ballot papers on pathways leading to the polling station. Adding to the festive atmosphere was the crafting of democracy bracelets and offers to apply themed henna and manicures.”

During the election you can chalk the vote by promoting the campaign with the Council of Canadians website, #GoVote2015 twitter hashtag, why you’re voting, etc.

For advance polls and election day, you can chalk the vote with large arrows and voting hours and location to remind people when and where to vote. Be sure to confirm your local polling station with Elections Canada at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca).
BIRD-DOGGING

An effective way to highlight issues during an election campaign is through last-minute protests during the leaders’ tours. The main aim of this type of protest, known as “bird-dogging,” is to capture some media attention – including from journalists that are accompanying the leaders’ tour to cover it – and to highlight your issue. Sometimes effective bird-dogging, when carried out in multiple communities during an election campaign, can define what people will vote for on election day.

You will usually not get much advance notice – you might have only 5-6 hours before the impending arrival of a leader’s tour so you’ll need to put the pieces in place ahead of time and be ready to go at a moment’s notice. This means having materials on hand (including any banners, flyers, and press releases) and having your team prepped.

One of the most reliable ways to get notified about when the leaders’ tours are arriving in your community is to follow the journalists in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, many of whom will often be assigned to the various leaders tours. You can bookmark this link (or follow the list on Twitter): www.twitter.com/DylanPenner/lists/press-gallery

“Bird-Dogging” protestors greet the Harper and Trudeau campaign buses.
ORGANIZING AN ALL-CANDIDATES MEETING

Hosting an all-candidates meeting as a local group or part of a larger coalition is a great way to get important issues debated in your community during the election campaign. Organizing the event will take some time and logistical management. Below is a step-by-step checklist to help make your job easier.

BUILDING A TEAM

» Develop a network with other activist groups and organize a planning meeting. Possible allies could include parent/teacher groups, faith groups, unions, service clubs, social justice coalitions, student groups, environmental organizations, and cultural groups. Remember that successful partnerships are based on:
  o Trust and mutual respect for one another.
  o Shared objectives, responsibilities, and authority.
  o Clearly defined roles and realistic expectations.
  o Having a sense of ownership for the issues.
  o Perceiving positive benefits from participation.
  o Group consensus in decisions for action.

» Determine how much money you will have to spend and draw up a budget that includes ideas for funding.

» Delegate responsibilities and duties by assigning people to:
  o Send invitations, recruit moderators, prepare questions for candidates, and arrange for refreshments.
  o Locate a venue, arrange for any special equipment needed, and look after transportation needs.
  o Coordinate publicity, prepare posters, organize telephone trees, prepare hand-outs and inform the local media.

CHOOSING A VENUE

» Pick a venue that is accessible, centrally located, on a public transportation route, is wheelchair accessible, and has space for childcare needs.

» Plan for transportation for the elderly and recruit volunteer drivers.
PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

» Invite candidates *at least* two weeks in advance.

» Choose a moderator who is non-partisan, diplomatic, and firm – it’s a good idea to have a back-up chosen too.

» Come up with questions for candidates (you can use the Council’s Voter’s Guide for ideas).

» Decide which questions you want to ask from the floor and have people attend who are prepared to ask them.

» Determine a format for the meeting. It shouldn’t last longer than two hours.

» Organize refreshments.

MAKING SURE PEOPLE HEAR ABOUT THE MEETING

» Let people know about the all-candidates meeting by organizing telephone trees, informing other groups, asking your local media to run a public service announcement, by putting up posters, and sharing your event on social media.

» Let the media know about the meeting one week ahead of time and send out a press release after the meeting is over.

» Ask people to write post-meeting letters to the editor.
ELECTION MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Obtaining local media coverage for your event or action is a great way to bring more attention to your efforts to increase voter turnout and will help amplify our coast to coast efforts. Below, you will find tips and sample templates that you can use to help promote your actions, events, and local organizing.

KEY COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

- **Messaging**: Election talking points (see page 17).
- **A public service announcement (PSA)** is essentially a short audio or video ad distributed to media outlets for use in promoting your event to the public.
- **A letter to the editor** is a short written piece submitted for publication to the relevant contact in the local newsroom (usually a comment or opinions editor). They are usually 100-250 words in length, although newspapers in smaller communities will sometimes run longer letters.
- **A media advisory** is a brief written announcement intended to get media out to your event (press conference, canvassing blitz, candidates’ debate, rally, public forum, information leafleting, etc.) by highlighting why the event is newsworthy and providing sufficient advance notice.
- **A press release** is intended to give reporters the information they need to write a story (and ideally an incentive to call you for more information and/or interviews).
- **Outreach**. The act of reaching out to different people, organizations and communities is a central feature of any successful event. Outreach methods include posters and flyers, word of mouth through your networks, distribution of information to email lists, etc.
- **Social media** is an increasingly important part of any communications and outreach strategy. It can be used to engage journalists, elected officials and the general public – including people in your community. Social media shouldn’t be used to replace other forms of communication in your strategy, but when used well, social media can significantly amplify and enrich your overall effort.
**MESSAGING: Election talking points**

**Primary messaging:**

» Go vote for the change you want.

» Increasing voter turnout in the next election can change the game. To do that we’re organizing from coast to coast to encourage people to “Go Vote.”

» We’re urging people to take a Voter Pledge, our commitment to each other to vote in the next election and encourage at least two others to do the same.

» In the last federal election, just a handful of voters (6,201 to be precise) made the difference in electing a majority government for the Harper Conservatives. In that same election, more than 9.4 million eligible Canadian voters didn’t cast a ballot. Even more worrisome, the age group with the lowest percentage of voter turnout was youth aged 18-24.

» It’s been nine years of job losses, cuts to health care and other public services, falling wages, and environmental neglect. It’s time for change. Together, let’s build the future we want.

**Issue-based framing:**

» This election, we can vote for a stronger health care system where people get the care they need, when they need it.

» This election, we can vote to defend and expand democracy by supporting candidates that will implement proportional representation and oppose voter suppression.

» This election, we can vote for a country where everyone can retire with dignity.

» This election, we can vote to protect and expand public services like home mail delivery.

» Together, we can choose a government that creates good jobs, invests in public health care, addresses climate change, and so much more.

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**Sample Public Service Announcement (30 second length)**

Run until *[Date]*

**Momentum building in [your community/riding] for change in upcoming federal election**

**SCRIPT:** It’s been nine years of job losses, cuts to health care and other public services, falling wages, and environmental neglect. It’s time for change. People from coast to coast are uniting to vote in the next federal election for a different way forward. Together, let’s build the future we want. Get involved at a *[type of action/event]* at the *[location/time & date]*. For more information, visit www.canadians.org/election. Let’s go vote!
TIPS FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor have the best chance of being published when they respond directly to a recent article in the newspaper (within a day or so of the story’s publication) and are written in your own words. Check the website of the paper you are submitting a letter to for writing guidelines. Many papers will indicate their preferred letter length, format, deadlines, etc.

• Letters to the editor are usually 150-250 words long (although some smaller community newspapers publish longer letters). Shorter letters often have a better chance of being published.

• Even if your letter is not published, the more letters an editor gets on a given topic, the better the chances are that the newspaper will cover that topic, or at least include a representative sample of letters on the issue. It can be a very worthwhile activity for every member of a chapter to write their own letter in response to a key news story.

• You can use the talking points on page 17 as a starting point for drafting a letter.

• You can send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper by emailing it to the appropriate contact or by using the Council Canadians’ online form at www.canadians.org/action/letter-editor.
TIPS FOR MEDIA ADVISORIES

If you choose to notify the media about an upcoming event you are organizing, a media advisory is an important tool to provide journalists with advance notice. You can send media advisories as early as two or three weeks before your event, or as late as a few days before your event, depending on the nature of the media outlets you send it to (weekly publications and monthly magazines need more lead-time, for example).

- It’s important to include the basic details of who, what, when, where and why.
- Be sure to include a contact person with a phone number and email address, for journalists seeking more information or interviews. Decide ahead of time who your spokesperson will be. It can be the same person as the contact you list on the advisory, but it doesn’t have to be.
- Follow-up calls play an important role in getting journalists’ attention. Make sure your contact or spokesperson is available when reporters are likely to call or, if you do miss a call, return any messages from journalists as promptly as possible.

Sample Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

Momentum for change growing in [your community/riding], local [event] planned

The [your organization/chapter] is [holding an event to encourage people to Go Vote] as part of the growing movement for change in the upcoming federal election

WHO: [your organization/chapter] and [any allies involved]. [Include short bios or titles of speakers or musicians if applicable]

WHAT: The groups will be organizing to increase voter turnout in the election by [door-to-door canvassing/candidates’ debate/block party/etc].

WHEN: [time and date]

WHERE: [location, including address]

WHY: In the last federal election, just a handful of voters (6,201 across 14 ridings to be precise) made the difference in electing a majority government for the Harper Conservatives. In that same election, more than 9.4 million eligible Canadian voters didn’t cast a ballot. Even more worrisome, the age group with the lowest percentage of voter turnout was youth aged 18-24. This event is part of a growing effort from coast to coast to change the game this election.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview in advance, contact [insert contact information, phone #, email address and website] – www.canadians.org/election | Twitter: #GoVote2015
TIPS FOR PRESS RELEASES

When you write your press release keep in mind what makes a story newsworthy: dramatic human interest, controversy, striking visual images, local angles, tie-ins to current and upcoming major events or anniversaries, to name a few. As with media advisories, be sure to include a contact person. These tips will help you get your message across:

- **Hooks galore.** Press releases work best with a short, catchy headline, and no more than five paragraphs (approximately one page), including quotes, explaining the basic “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of your message. Be sure to let reporters know if there is a photo opportunity at the event – they may be interested in coming out for this.

- **Target your reporter(s).** Follow-up calls to reporters, or “pitching” can help you get in the news. Reporters often receive dozens of press releases a day and your call can help make your event stand out from the pack. It’s not always easy, though. Take some time before you call to formulate your thoughts. If you’re calling reporters you haven’t spoken with in the past, it’s helpful to research the stories they’ve done ahead of time so you are familiar with the topics they focus on.

- **Be timely.** Send press releases the day before or early in the morning of the event. Your aim is to gain attention, and to give the media an idea of what is newsworthy about your story. Morning and early afternoons are good times to make pitches. If a reporter sounds rushed, offer to call back later. If you get their voicemail, leave the basics and call back at a better time.

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**Sample Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

[Event] in [your community/riding] part of growing movement for change in federal election

The [your organization/chapter] is [holding an event to encourage people to Go Vote] as part of the growing movement for change in the upcoming federal election.

“Change is in the air. It’s great to see people from across our community gathering to increase voter turnout this election,” said [your spokesperson]. “We’re urging people to take a Voter Pledge and commit to vote in the federal election, and also encourage at least two other people to do the same.”

“This is a watershed election that could be a real fork in the road for Canadians,” said Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians. “After nine years of job losses, health care privatization, falling wages, environmental neglect, and austerity, it’s time for change. But that will only happen if we get out and vote for it.”

In the last federal election, just a handful of voters (6,201 across 14 ridings to be precise) made the difference in electing a majority government for the Harper Conservatives. In that same election, more than 9.4 million eligible Canadian voters didn’t cast a ballot. Even more worrisome, the age group with the lowest percentage of voter turnout was youth aged 18-24. This event is part of efforts from coast to coast to change the game this election.

“We’re looking forward to change in the upcoming election and we’re going to keep organizing in [riding] to make it happen,” said [your spokesperson].

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook

» Set up an event. Invite everyone you know and ask them to do the same.
» Like key pages and share content.
» Create a local group or page for your chapter if you don’t have one yet.
» RSVP to our Facebook event “2015 Federal Election: Will you vote?” and invite your friends: www.facebook.com/events/704910732969453/

Twitter

» Tweeting
  o Sign up at www.twitter.com and tweet regularly – at least a couple times a day in the lead up to events you are organizing. Include links to interesting facts and news reports related to your event, and include the link to information about the event whenever possible (whether it’s a link to the Facebook event or Canadians.org).
  o Craft tweets that are around 100 characters long so that people can retweet them without the end getting cut off.
  o You can also take a “voter selfie” – tweet a picture of yourself with a sign about why you’re voting “I will vote because... #iwillvote2015.” Be sure to leave an extra 10-15 characters in tweets with photos to ensure you have enough space for the link to the picture. NOTE: Ballot selfies – photos of marked ballots - taken at the polling station are currently illegal under Canadian election law.

» Hashtags: Try to use a variety of twitter hashtags (keywords preceded by the # symbol, which help sort information on Twitter by topic and location), including national and local ones. It’s best to use no more than two hashtags in a given tweet.
  o Nationally, the key hashtags we’re using for the Go Vote and Game Changers campaigns are #GoVote2015 and #iwillvote2015
  o Key national hashtags people are using to discuss politics and the upcoming election are #cdnpoli and #elxn42
  o Local hashtags will vary widely, depending where you are. Provinces, cities, and communities, generally have local political hashtags in use. Many ridings will have hashtags of their own to discuss local politics during the election. Look for those and use them regularly to reach people engaged in local politics and activism. For example, in Ottawa #ott and #ottpoli are used, as is #onpoli for Ontario-related political tweeting.
  o For campus and student-related tweets, there are hashtags like #uottawa (University of Ottawa).

» Sample tweets:
  o Join the campaign to increase voter turnout in #elxn42. Block party to unblock the vote, 12-4 p.m. Saturday at [your street]. | #topoli #GoVote2015
  o From coast to coast, people agree it’s time for change. Act now – take the voter pledge at canadians.org/voterpledge| #cdnpoli #GoVote2015
  o This election, I’m voting to restore the $36 billion cut from our public health care system #iwillvote2015 #cdnpoli
WE ARE HERE TO HELP

Community members are organizing locally to defend and exercise the right to vote across the country. Contact us to join the network of Council of Canadian supporters, chapter activists, students, workers, and others defending democracy. Send an email and update us on your progress, or call us toll-free at 1-800-387-7177. We would love to feature your work on our website and share your stories and ideas with other communities in Canada. Visit our website to find out more about this ongoing campaign.

For more information about the Council of Canadians’ election campaign visit our website at www.canadians.org/election or call toll-free at 1-800-387-7177. To request additional election organizing materials, including voter pledge cards, voter pledge collection sheets, buttons, etc. please email Phil Charbonneau at pcharbonneau@canadians.org.

Thank you for taking action for democracy in your community. Let’s Go Vote!